DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 108 473 FL 006 915

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TITLE A Future for the Past: Remarks on the State and Responsibilities of the Classics in America.
PUB DATE 75
NOTE 12p.
JOURNAL CIT MALT Bulletin; v49 n3 p25-34 Spr 1975

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.76 HC-$1.58 PLUS POSTAGE
DESCRIPTORS *Classical Languages; Classical Literature; *College Language Programs; College Majors; Cooperative Teaching; Curriculum Planning; Degree Requirements; English Departments; *Greek; Greek Literature; Interdisciplinary Approach; *Language Instruction; *Latin; Latin Literature; Second Languages

ABSTRACT

Unlike modern foreign languages, but like English and Biblical Hebrew, the Graeco-Roman tradition constitutes a major component of the cultural identity of every native speaker of English, and, as such, should be a mandatory part of every American's intellectual luggage. Because of the academy's relectance to face the fact that our active environment and the demands made upon our schools are radically different from what they were a century ago, however, we have failed to place the Graeco-Roman tradition within its proper perspective and to adjust our teaching aims and methods accordingly, with the result that this indispensable part of our education is in serious danger of being totally eliminated from our schools and colleges. Teachers of Greek and Latin at all levels would do well to reassess the potential contribution of their subject matters to contemporary America and to join their colleagues from other disciplines in the implementation of interdisciplinary courses and degree programs. (Author)

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A FUTURE FOR THE PAST: REMARKS ON THE STATE AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE CLASSICS IN AMERICA[1]

The following remarks on the current state and possible future of the Classics do not presume to say anything which has not already occurred to everyone concerned. If they have any value at all, it is only because they are addressed to professional classicists by someone from another discipline, and all teachers--classicists and modernists alike--must perforce deal with outsiders to their discipline. In particular, they must deal with two kinds of outsiders: the students and their formal or informal advisors--or, to put the same thing in somewhat more realistic terms, with the consumers and the various guides to consumer buying. Notwithstanding the encouraging results of a few experiments in the East and the Mid-west, statistics make it painfully clear that the consumers are no longer buying the wares of the Classical Establishment: Latin will soon be out of the schools unless this trend is reversed, and more than one penurious college is currently questioning the rationale for keeping the Classics in the catalogue. Teachers of Latin at the high school know these facts first-hand, and a glance at the program of the national Conference on Educational Innovation and the Smaller Classics Department, sponsored jointly by the HEW and APA and organized by Arthur Robson at Beloit College in 1973, will suggest that professors of Classics at the smaller colleges are seriously questioning the future of their profession.

I regret having to state my impression that no real awareness of this situation has yet reached all the graduate schools which are most influential in shaping the Classics in America and which seem determined to continue turning out products for which there has been no widespread demand since the death of Wilamowitz. I recently discussed this problem with a professor of classical philology at a major university, and I called his attention to catastrophic figures concerning enrollment in Greek and Latin at several colleges and to the equally catastrophic correlation which one could foresee between these figures and future hiring policies. His reaction was typical: he assured me that what went on at these institutions was no concern of his, since he knew that there would always be a few serious students to enroll at his own university and seek initiation to the intricacies of true classical philology; in fact he thought that the demise of lesser departments of Classics might even increase consumer demand in his own. I wonder, however, what will happen to this prospective consumer demand when the would-be consumers get wise to the all-too-obvious fact that the intricacies of true classical philology must be learned at the cost of giving up the meal ticket which would presumably come along with the intricacies of true sociology or true computer science. Students of Latin will recognize my clumsy but palpable allusion: whereas the presumably illiterate Sociological Establishment has learned Quintillian's lesson that most young people are teachable, the presumably literate Classical Establishment has been acting upon the assumption that the masses who now populate our schools should pay the classical philologist to limit his teaching to a self-proclaimed elite that vanished years ago and has no place in our social structure.

I am not suggesting, incidentally, that the suicidal tendency which I have sketched here is an exclusively classical malady. Modern foreign languages are in some respects almost as badly off as Greek and Latin, and the following anecdote may serve to illustrate the nature of their most common illness. I once had the pleasure of addressing a group of teachers of French. The time

was the early 1960's, and I could then speak with all the brashness and self-confidence which lack of experience usually lends to assistant professors. In addition, I had set for myself the easiest of all possible tasks: the listing and illustration of a few of the most disastrous imbecilities in the teaching of foreign languages and the training of teachers and scholars in that field. I confessed that the general tenor of instruction in foreign languages at that time seemed to me so idiotic that I could not conscionably encourage my students to wander into the foreign language classroom instead of taking up the study of philosophy or history. I recall concluding with a statement to the effect that, unless the Foreign Language Establishment undertake a serious reform, we could conceivably expect some colleges to lessen their foreign language requirement within the next quarter of a century. The strictly polite but glacial plaudits which reluctantly greeted the conclusion of my performance for a third of a second told me that my initial self-confidence had been unwarranted, and the embarrassed manner in which the group chairman called for questions which never came confirmed the suspicion that I had failed to get through to my audience.

With the passage of years, I have erased from my memory much of the picture of disbelief and muted outrage which met me on both sides of the aisle as I was slinking my way from the podium to the exit door. I remember much more vividly, however, the concupiscible young woman who caught up with me as I was leaving the building: she radiated love for the world and determination to show me the error of my ways and lead me back on the path of righteousness. French, she assured me, was alive and well in America, and it was getting better every day because of the way she and others like her were teaching it in beginning and intermediate courses at college. Her method, I gathered, was something which she termed the oral-aural approach, the materials were carefully selected to answer the needs of everyday French conversation, students spent long hours in the language laboratory to master the intricacies of pronunciation, structure had the edge over vocabulary, and no time was wasted over old books which have nothing to say about current activities in Paris; but culture was by no means neglected, and third-semester students were exposed to the poetry of Jacques Prévert and selections from several magazines. The effectiveness of the method had been amply demonstrated by the fact that students who visited Paris experienced no difficulty in riding the <u>metro</u> and dating natives of either sex. Furthermore, I had been as mistaken about the quality of teacher-training as I had been about language courses. While teaching at a local college, my decorative interlocutor was working for the Ph.D. at a state university, and she now assured me not only that its graduate program was excellent but that it was getting better every day: contrary to the intellectually stultifying practices of earlier days, doctoral students in French were no longer required to waste their time on other Romance Languages and literatures, German had been eliminated, and the Middle Ages had been de-emphasized in order to make room for concentration upon the realities of contemporary life. The only objectionable aspect of the program was a vestigial Latin requirement whereby a student must demonstrate the ability to translate a brief paragraph from the <u>De Bello Gallico</u> before receiving the doctorate; but this relic of a less enlightened era would soon be abolished to enable young scholars to devote their undivided attention to the serious business of studying their own time. Her part of the conversation was, of course, in French for she was French and had come to the United States equipped with a <u>licence</u> in Modern Letters. She adduced as further evidence of the quality of her graduate department the fact that about one-third of her fellow students were native French speakers and several of the professors had been born and trained in France, so that the entire educational operation could be carried on without risk of contamination by English or American literature. In effect, the young lady had illustrated nearly all the

reasons why I believed that foreign languages were already in trouble, and she had contributed an additional argument which I might otherwise have missed: in pragmatic terms, voting to maintain the foreign language requirement at her graduate institution was like voting to use tax money to bring over French-born and French-trained professors to teach French to partially French-trained native French speakers whose contribution to American education was to teach their pupils to ride the metro like a Parisian. As a taxpayer, I must confess that the economics of the operation did not strike me as illustrative of Cartesian logic. Still speaking as a taxpayer, I cannot pretend to a substantially more favorable reaction at the sight of the British-born and British-trained professor of Classics apparently imported for the principal purpose of providing philological instruction for young Englishmen who have crossed the Atlantic because they could only manage a "second" at Oxford.

To conclude my anecdote with a footnote, subsequent events have only too clearly demonstrated that I was wrong, though not in the way which had so disturbed my audience; contrary to my prediction, it did not take twenty-five years for some colleges to lessen their foreign language requirement; it took only ten for a majority of American institutions to abolish it.

In view of the foregoing remarks, I must insist that I did not then, and do not now, assume that teachers of foreign languages are harder to reach than teachers of English. Indeed, the very evening before my ill-advised remarks to teachers of French, I had participated in a conference of English teachers where I had been roundly told off and branded an enemy of democracy and progress for having suggested that future teachers of English might occasionally be encouraged to do a little work in Latin and a modern language. I must also insist that my eminent success at antagonizing both the teachers of English and the teachers of foreign languages was regrettably not connected to any Cassandra-like power to "see and tell / Of things invisible to mortal sight". In fact, my convictions were the result of pure chance and had required neither brains nor vision on my part. I had been a very inept graduate student and had received my degree from an institution whose only requirement seemed to be that graduate students must enroll in four courses each semester. Since my ineptitude had provided me with an excuse for seldom calling upon my advisor, I had allowed myself to plan my program on the basis of convenience rather than contents and had almost consistently ended by enrolling in courses in English and three different languages at the same time. As a fringe benefit of this constant juxtaposition, various kinds of inanities which I had ignored until then had suddenly become blatantly inescapable even to the dullest of mortal sights; and my subsequent service on numerous doctoral committees at Berkeley had taught me that educational stupidity was by no means the monopoly of my own alma mater. In this light, my unwelcome remarks were hardly more controversial than Mr. Jourdain's discovery that he had been speaking prose all his life. To a group of teachers whose academic training had presumably been more carefully directed than mine, however, it must have sounded like a bargain-basement Aelfric calling upon his audience to stand at attention and recite, "nos pueri rogamus te, magister, ut doceas nos loqui. . .recte, quia idiote sumus et corrupte loquimur".

My goal here is far more pretentious than it was on the occasion described above and must needs be approached with circumspection: instead of repeating a warning against an impending catastrophe which has already occurred, I wish to try my hand at the risky business of charting some of the roads which may conceivably lead to honorable reconstruction of the crumbling and partially discredited edifice of Greek and Latin instruction in the United States.

Since I have argued that the current debacle of the Classics is partly matched by that of the modern foreign languages, I must now remind you that the situation of the former is radically different from that of the latter. Even if we were to dispense with all the teachers of French, the language of Molière would presumably continue to be spoken in France for years to come, and the citizens of the twenty-first century would experience no serious difficulty in returning to the text of The Would-Be Gentleman if they felt a need for it. On the other hand, a similar action in respect to teachers of the Classics would perforce spell the end of a nearly three-thousand year old tradition, for there are no native speakers of classical Greek and Latin to carry the languages of Homer and Virgil into the twenty-first century. In other words, the same disease which can at most cripple modern foreign languages could conceivably prove fatal to the Classics. John Latimer, who has analyzed this situation more carefully than anyone within my ken, has recently summed up the prospects as follows: "The Classics are on trial for their very existence. The outcome of that trial is very much in doubt. . .".[2] It is with the deepest anxiety that I must concur with this diagnosis, for the tradition of Greece and Rome is my past--as it is the past of every citizen of the English-speaking world--and I believe with Goethe, Chaucer, and Cicero himself, that a man without a past is quite simply not a man.

The foregoing observations point to another fundamental difference between the Classics and the modern foreign languages. Notwithstanding my earlier strictures against teaching methods and degree programs, I should regret the demise of French on the American campus as well as the concomitant disappearance of the beaming freshman who triumphantly announces that he or she is taking French from Mademoiselle X, who is bringing the word directly from Vincennes. But then, I should remind my freshman that charter flights and youth hostels now make it possible to travel abroad and observe the quaint natives in their natural habitat. In view of the respective cost of air travel and college tuition, there may even be some truth in the implied message of every study-abroad program: that it makes no sense to spend money on a visit to the zoo when one can fly to Africa and see the real jungle for the same price. In other words, the demise of the professor of French would merely bring about a regrettable change in the techniques whereby we gather information about adjacent cultures, but no insuperable loss would occur. Because Molière himself (great though he be) is only tangential to the cultural tradition of the English-speaking world, I have no more right to chide the teacher of French when he makes a mess of his subject matter than I have to chide the brothel-owner who staffs his place of business with sexually repulsive women. On the other hand, I have a right to be mightily angry when the teacher of Classics makes a mess of his subject matter. By failing to attract me to his house (if the continuing metaphor may be forgiven), he is in effect robbing me of my rightful inheritance, and I am justified in demanding an explanation for his irresponsible management of our common property. When he joins forces with the teacher of English and the teacher of Hebrew, their compounded stupidity robs me and my children of our very family: of the Bible, of Homer, of Plato, of Virgil, of Chaucer, and of Shakespeare, to name only those in the highest-income bracket--and we are led culturally naked into the world. Everyone knows that these teachers--particularly those who practice at the university level--have indeed made a mess of things: not so long ago, they ruled education; today, the average American student is unlikely to have read a line composed before 1970, if he has read anything at all.

Although my assessment of the situation is made with anxiety, it is <u>not</u> made with despair, for I believe that the Classics may not only recover their prestige and influence but that they may conceivably come out stronger than ever, though

admittedly in a shape that must bear the mark of the shock treatment necessary to the cure. This conviction, along with my admiration for Ralph Nader, is my excuse for joining a consumer-action group and taking an advisory hand in the matter.

The kinds of action that must be taken to rebuild the Classics are innumerable, and I must beg forgiveness for the exigencies of space and time which force me to cram them arbitrarily into three grab-bags for the sake of illustration:

1. We must swear off the habit of trying to sell the Classics for what they may have been but are no longer, and we might even try selling them for what they really are. I submit that Antiquity will sell better on its own merits than on pathetically outdated claims.

2. We must not only assess the formal educational structure within which the Classics must operate, but we must also come forth with positive, vigorous, and flexible responses to this assessment.

3. We must do an infinitely better job of public relations than we have even thought of until now.

I shall try to elaborate upon these grab-bags.

Anyone who talks to school teachers of Latin--and even to professors of Classics with pre-1945 Ph.D.'s--knows that the arguments advanced in favor of their discipline still read like the table of contents of a little book published in 1918 by Frances Sabin: The Relation of Latin to Practical Life. Alas, a random sampling of the claims it made in support of Latin will merely suggest that 1918 is no longer with us.

Latin makes the English language more intelligible: Probably true in 1918, but English instructors to whom I have shown this statement have been almost unanimous in their perhaps not totally disinterested conviction that an additional course in English would do their students far greater good than all the Latin in the world.
Latin and Greek are of supreme value to the mastery of literary English: Perhaps, but I have yet to meet the student who wants to write like Milton or even Disraeli; and the last teacher who might have encouraged anyone to do so must have been trained by Miss Sabin herself.
Latin and Greek words form a large part of the terminology of science: But, of course, scientific terms are now being replaced by code numbers.
Latin contributes more or less directly to success in the professions: Not totally improbable, but the people who devise lists of subjects recommended for admission to the professional schools have obviously never been told of this possibility.
Latin illuminates textbooks of Roman history: Nobody is likely to deny this claim; but then, almost nobody reads textbooks of Roman history anymore.

Obviously, Miss Sabin's arguments will not do in the 1970's, and they will at best reveal their exponent as a superannuated innocent and at worst as a complete idiot, neither of which labels is likely to gain him students eager to master the beauties of the Greek accusative in Latin.

On the other hand, we can make powerful claims that are valid by any standards, because the materials we call the Classics answer certain powerful and very real needs in young people. If we are willing to equip ourselves with the critical tools that speak to the literary mind, we ought to have no trouble convincing

our students that the Metamorphoseon is as worthy of attention as The Boots of the Virgin and that Daphnis and Chloe has the edge over Love Story. We can certainly do the same thing with history and politics if we have acquired the appropriate tools. Above all, the Classics have a trump card which ought to be played immediately but judiciously. This trump card is the fact that America is groping for a way out of the hopeless boredom which is destroying us. In a world where one finds the same freeway and supermarket in Wisconsin and in Yugoslavia, where one sees the same movie in Los Angeles and in Timbuctu, and where one finds the same pair of pants on men and women in Madrid and in New York, geographic mobility no longer offers an escape from boredom, and the heroin habit is too costly for most of us. Our only recourse is travel into the dead past. Greece and Rome are dead; and, because they are dead, they are different from the living boredom of the present. Yet, because they have been the lifeblood of our world for centuries, they are not so totally different as to be unrecognizable: they are, indeed, the most effective escape from murderous boredom that anyone has to offer young America today. After all, we cannot expect our government to stage a Watergate Affair every year to keep us entertained and I find Catullus XIII altogether as entertaining as Mr. Dean's testimony, and much easier on my tax assessment.

As for the educational structure within which the Classics must operate, I believe that we must recognize the fact that college today is not merely a diluted version of what it was in the good old days. In reality, the functions and activities of the modern college bear almost no resemblance to those of its great-grandfather, although both institutions may share the same name, the same location, and even the same physical plant. Failure to take full cognizance of this fact has affected the state of foreign languages in general and of the Classics in particular in a way which could probably be determined statistically but at which we can guess closely enough for the present purpose. A hundred years ago, an American college was usually a place where a select group of people taught and studied both the sciences and the humanistic tradition of the Western World. Until about 1898, for example, admission to Harvard was contingent upon completion of a fair amount of English, history, and mathematics, along with at least six years of Latin and either French or German, and four years of classical Greek. All these subjects were continued at college, where the sophomore English course was Anglo-Saxon and where a majority of students picked up at least a fourth foreign language--usually Italian or Hebrew--before graduation. Students in search of vocational training would follow their education with a few years in engineering or architecture or something of the sort at M.I.T. I do not believe that the selection of students and faculty was on the basis of intelligence, but it was a selection nonetheless, and one can require a select group to do certain things which cannot be required from the population at large: the boys at Harvard studied their three or four ancient and modern languages, but the ditch-digger, the grocer, the sailor, and the farmer had little time to indulge in the amenities of humanistic culture. Today, however, more than sixty percent of all Americans attend some sort of college at one time or another, and the subjects offered for concentration range from Home Economics to Journalism and from Animal Husbandry to Nuclear Physics; furthermore, the Federal Government, most of the state governments, and innumerable would-be philanthropic foundations have increasingly made it a practice to pay the colleges to keep students off the street and intellectually idle. In other words, a college is now a place where people between the ages of eighteen and twenty-two are assembled without regard for their respective interests and previous training.

I do not wish to argue here that the current situation is necessarily bad, or good, but I do wish to insist that it calls for a much more serious and honest

reconsideration of the nature of college requirements--particularly of the moribund foreign language requirements--than both the academic radicals and the academic conservatives have hitherto been willing to undertake. I suggest that the Foreign Language Establishment might do well to admit that a general requirement in a foreign language would be tantamount to requiring every prospective auto mechanic to learn how to order a Gauloise Bleue in French or a Wiener Schnitzel in German before he may be permitted to repair his first overhead cam--and recent developments have made it only too clear that prospective auto mechanics (even those who intend to work for the Ph.D. in automotive engineering) will tolerate no such foolishness. Conversely, the academy as a whole might do well to admit that any citizen of the so-called civilized world who claims a concern for the cultural quality of life but has not pondered over historical, literary, and philosophical documents in languages other than his own must at worst prove an incompetent and at best a fraud. Until very few years ago, our failure to recognize that the changes in the nature of college training were qualitative rather than quantitative had brought about a thoroughly idiotic situation: in a vain effort to force a little foreign language upon people who had no use for it and would have none of it, we had given up requiring much foreign language from those who ought to have had it. I submit that we might have done better to let the chemist graduate without any foreign language but to require the historian, the philosopher, and the student of English to undergo long and intense training in Latin and at least another language before graduation. Today, the situation has further deteriorated to the point where one may graduate in English or history without even the rudiment of a foreign language, and I know of at least one major department of philosophy which recently abolished its last foreign language requirement for the Ph.D.

Recognition of the fact that college today is not the same thing as college a century ago must almost necessarily come hand in hand with the realization that the world of the average citizen today is not what it was a century ago. Unlike the modern auto mechanic, the carriage maker of the nineteenth century did not have to go to high school and college to learn his craft; for all practical purposes, the objects, facts, and people that came within his ken were predominantly American, and most of them bore the stamp of his home town. In contrast, the modern mechanic must repair automobiles manufactured in Japan, France, and Germany; he is bombarded with more facts than he can ever assimilate about China, the Soviet Union, Africa, and the Arab countries; and the most modest success in his line of work is sure to bring along direct or indirect confrontation with foreigners who have converged upon him from the four corners of the world to sell him their products or buy his vote on the latest international issue: willy nilly, he has become a citizen of the world and ought to function in accordance with his new calling. It is in respect to this change of citizenship that we find the most important difference between past and present. Although the average citizen of mid-nineteenth-century Concord, for example, had never pursued his formal education beyond grade school, he had some notion of his tradition, the nature of his world, and his own place in the scheme of things: he had heard the names of Horatius Cocles and Julius Caesar, he had been exposed over and over again to a simplified version of the high points of British and American history, and he shared with his relatives and friends a firm and thoroughly prejudiced view of the past and present history of Concord itself; he had memorized portions of the King James Bible and some retelling of classic myths as well as several English and American poems, and he knew for a fact that the writing of literature was a perfectly normal thing which was going on right at home with real, live citizens of the town--with Mr. Hawthorne, who would occasionally write standing up rather than sitting down like everybody else, with Mr. Emerson, who was inordinately fond of pie for breakfast, or with that madman Thoreau, whose only excuse for living was that he

occasionally chopped Mr. Emerson's wood for a fee. The modern citizen of the world may well happen to reside in Concord, and the chances are that he has graduated from college, but I hope not to be stretching the credibility gap when I assume that we ought not to count upon his familiarity with the high points of any tradition, historical or otherwise. Because Covenant Theology is no longer a central force in America, we may assume that not much of his formal schooling has been devoted to the Bible; because educational psychologists have convinced us that exercising our memory will do bad things to our heads, we may assume that his poetic repertory is at best of a limited kind; because he could not reasonably be expected to have taken courses on the history and culture of all the countries with which he must deal, we may assume that, in contrast to his ancestors, he lives in total ignorance of the world of which he has perforce become an active citizen.

I have already stated my view that the mere fact that we send the average citizen to college is no justification for asking him to study a foreign language, but this view does not imply that we cannot convince him of the necessity of studying certain documents originally composed in ancient and modern foreign languages. In other words, just as our hypothetical nineteenth-century citizen of Concord was willing to study his past and present environment as long as he did not have to devote to learning a foreign language time that were better spent learning a trade in his father's shop, so I suspect that the modern citizen of the world would be enthusiastically willing to study his own enlarged past and present environment as long as we do not ask him to devote to learning a foreign language time that were better spent learning a trade with the chemist, the engineer, or the applied economist. Naturally, we cannot reasonably expect our average citizen to spend more time studying his past and present environment than his forebears were willing to do, so that we must not attempt to force upon him a high school or college course on each national tradition that immediately affects him. What we can do, however, is to offer him carefully integrated courses in which important documents from several such traditions are presented in a manner that makes them as relevant to him today as the Bible was in mid-nineteenth-century Concord. On the literary side, we know only too well that courses dealing with English versions of heterogeneous ancient and modern foreign books have long appeared among the offerings of both our colleges and our high schools, where they have usually been taught in the Department of English by teachers trained exclusively in English and thus incapable of doing any better by the texts than their students would on their own. This situation has begun to change at the college level, and the trend is beginning to reflect upon the staffing of high school courses. Much more must be done, however, and teachers of classical languages would do well to participate, not only in comparative and general literature courses, but also in integrated programs in the social sciences: after all Aristotle and Thucydides wrote in Greek as well as Aeschylus.

I hope that the foregoing remarks have not been misconstrued as implying a wish to take the teacher of Classics away from his central concern in order to turn him into a poorly-qualified dispenser of cosmic wisdom in English translation. Much as the mass of college students today has neither the same aims nor the same aptitudes as the young men who went to Nassau Hall to study with Jonathan Edwards in 1758, a fair portion of our current college population remains intent upon pursuing studies which would by no means have been considered disgraceful around the halls of the University of Basel when Friedrich Nietzsche occupied its chair of Greek Philology. Within the American context, there are even indications that the percentage of the total population willing to take up such studies is higher today than it was a hundred years ago, when college was restricted to the privileged few. There are also indications,

however, that very few of the currently available degree programs are designed to lead the student to the Greek or Latin classroom, so that the recent improvements which have taken place in language teaching are being implemented after the customers have already left, and many a gifted student is permitted to graduate without having learned a classical language which may be essential to the serious pursuit of his academic goals. The reasons for this abdication of educational responsibilities are many and certainly include the past and current sins of classical languages, but they also include a keen awareness of the realities of educational economics. I learned last year that a certain department of Comparative Literature had dropped its doctoral Latin requirement in order to compete for students with the department of English, and I am much too realistic a businessman to deny the economic wisdom of that move. On the other hand, the most elementary logic will show that the same economic parity could have been achieved by adopting the opposite strategy and installing a Latin requirement in the department of English. This alternative would have required long consultations between the two departments, and the department of English would probably have feared the danger of losing customers to the department of Speech, but the chances are that some sort of compromise could have been reached. In the area of humanistic studies, experience shows that lively degree programs which require both ancient and modern languages do not lose customers to programs which deal only with materials in the English language, and there are indications that the same thing holds true in other areas as well. The suggestion here is that classicists should take their cue from Odysseus' polytropic activities and come out of their hole to join their modern colleagues in the planning and implementation of the new interdisciplinary degree programs which are sprouting all over the country. I am quite aware that it is more fun to be Head Beagle in one's own farmhouse than to be Second Beagle in Rome; but then, if the farmhouse should burn down, one may belatedly discover that Rome no longer wants to house stray beagles.

The foregoing suggestion would result in asking some modernists to acquire a modicum of competence in Greek or Latin, and some classicists to return the favor by doing the same thing in the modern period, so that the purists will object to the danger of contamination, just as the young lady whom I mentioned at the outset feared the danger of contamination by things neither modern nor French. The only answer to this very legitimate objection is that a classicist without a modicum of carefully planned training in the modern period is merely another modernist 2000 years behind times. In effect, the question is very clear: is it better to turn out Classical Humanities majors who will have read Homer in the Lattimore version or to turn out ancient-modern majors who will have read Homer in Greek? Though I fully recognize the stop-gap value of the major in English translation as the last cartridge of the embattled classicist, let me assure you that it does not make Homer a bit more relevant to the student: it merely confirms the suspicion with which the modernist looks upon the classicist.

At my own institution, recent experiments in interdisciplinary teaching suggest two facts of importance to the Classics: (1) freshmen receiving instruction in English composition from a teacher of foreign languages tend to take up the study of the language taught by their teacher of composition, and (2) college courses which offer instruction in foreign languages in connection with English composition and literature are especially effective in turning out customers for upper-division courses in foreign languages: we have successfully tried such experiments with French, Greek, and Latin. Ever since 1951, when the faculty of Harvard University wrested the freshman composition course from the department of English and entrusted it to a university-wide committee, this mightiest of all bastions of departmental vested interests has been crumbling

with increasing momentum. A glance at current college catalogues, however, will show that the pieces do not often enough fall into the hands of teachers of Greek and Latin. In the light of the experiments mentioned above, I should urge classicists to consider increased participation in interdisciplinary programs which satisfy the requirement in English composition before the remodeling of the academic structure is over and the requirement in question has become the established property of teachers of Speech, American Linguistics, and the non-historical social sciences.

As for the improvement of public relations, the very statement of the case argues the obvious remedy. Turn on the so-called educational channel of your television set, and you will have a panel discussion of the latest performance of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead, but not often of a recent production of Phaedra; open the literary page of your Sunday paper, and you will find reviews of the most obscure local poets, but none of a recent translation or edition of a Latin text. A lecture at the local college by an authority on Allen Ginsberg will almost surely be taped and replayed over the radio, but few (if any) would think of doing the same thing with a lecture on Cornelius Nepos, and the fault is not exclusively that of the media.

There is, however, one area of public relations which I consider of equal importance with the media, and that is the relationship between college professor and high school teacher. To put it bluntly, let every professor be really concerned with the training of high school teachers whom he is willing to treat as colleagues and with whom he is willing to remain in touch, and Latin will have a chance to hold its own in the schools.

I should not be so presumptuous as to think that the few modest proposals which I have sketched are the only solutions to the problem. There are many others, and several are being tried with various measures of success. Only one thing is really important: the recognition that the current state of American education proclaims our quasi-total failure in the recent past. Let us forget our personal and professional vested interests, and let us turn our energies to the rehabilitation of the tradition which only we can impart to our pupils. If we do so, and if we do it unselfishly and with all our heart, there may indeed be a future for the past.

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FOOTNOTES

1 This paper is an abridgement and slight reworking of an address delivered before the Conference on Educational Innovation and the Smaller Classics Department, Beloit College, June 20-26, 1973.

2 John F. Latimer, The New Case for Latin and the Classics (Washington: Council for Basic Education Occasional Papers, XIX 1973), which prints the various statistics to which I have referred above.

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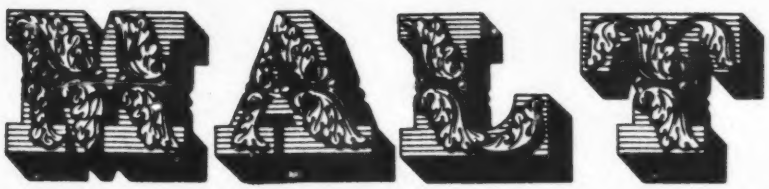

BULLETIN

Published by the Montana Association of Language Teachers, a constituent of the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, with the support of the University of Montana.

Volume XVIX, No. 3 *Spring, 1975*